

Clinical Sociology Review

Volume 13 | Issue 1

Article 14

1-1-1995

A World Without Words: The Social Construction of Children Born Deaf And Blind

Mitchell A. Kaplan

New York State Consortium for the Study of Disabilities

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr>

Recommended Citation

Kaplan, Mitchell A. (1995) "A World Without Words: The Social Construction of Children Born Deaf And Blind," *Clinical Sociology Review*: Vol. 13: Iss. 1, Article 14.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/csr/vol13/iss1/14>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@WayneState. It has been accepted for inclusion in Clinical Sociology Review by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@WayneState.

Book Reviews

A World Without Words: The Social Construction of Children Born Deaf And Blind, by David Goode. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, Health, Society, And Policy Series, 1994. 261 pp. \$44.95 cloth ISBN 1-56639-215-2. \$18.95 paper ISBN 1-56639-216-0.

Mitchell A. Kaplan, Ph.D, C.S.R.S.

Senior Research Associate

New York State Consortium for the Study of Disabilities

Office of Academic Affairs

City University of New York

David Goode has written a book which represents an important milestone in the sociological study of disability. Goode began his ground-breaking research on children with disabilities in the early 1970's when he was a graduate student completing work on his doctorate in sociology at UCLA. The research reported in this book was supported by a United States Public Health Service grant given to the Mental Retardation Research Center at the University of California at Los Angeles. The study was conducted between 1973 and 1976 under the supervision of senior ethnomethodologists Harold Garfinkel and Melvin Pollner whose teachings Goode drew upon very heavily in the conceptualization of his research.

Goode's research focused upon the clinical application of ethnomethodological techniques to the understanding of the day-to-day lives of children with rubella syndrome who were born deaf, blind, and mentally retarded in the 1960's. Utilizing participant observation techniques and ethnographic personal accounts, Goode's research opens a doorway for readers into the little known and little understood world of social interaction existing between children with severe multiple disabilities and the adult direct care workers and family care-givers who take care of them.

The book is organized into seven chapters, each dealing with a different stage of research process. In Chapter One Goode gives readers a

clear, concise, overview of the content of each section of the book and his reasons for wanting to get involved in this type of social research. In Chapters Two and Three Goode describes his "in-depth" personal observations of two deaf/blind mentally impaired children with whom he spent time, one living in an institutional setting of a state hospital ward and the other living in a non-institutional family setting. One of the critical questions that guided Goode's research was his desire to know and understand how deaf/blind mentally retarded children who have not developed formal verbal language skills communicate their basic human wants, needs, and desires to the adults who take care of them. In order to answer this question, Goode spent time observing and taking care of two deaf/blind mentally retarded children in their natural environments. Based upon his behavioral observations of the social interaction between himself and the two deaf/blind children with whom he lived, Goode was able to determine that despite their severe physical and mental limitations, these children were very capable of communicating their basic human wants, needs, and desires through a series of complex bodily gestures and routinized behavioral responses to stimuli in their immediate social environments.

In Chapter Four Goode reflects on the potential for human understanding without shared formal symbolic language. In his reflections on this issue, the author posits that shared formal language ability is but one of many human faculties allowing people to experience the world of social reality. It is indeed possible, for adults who can see and hear, to achieve rich, meaningful, and multifaceted relationships with children who do not possess the functional facility for shared symbolic verbal language. In Chapter Five Goode discusses the epistemological relationship between events as they occur in what he calls the lived order of everyday life and the representation of these everyday life events as seen in the data collected in social scientific research.

In Chapter Six Goode reviews the findings of a number of social scientific studies that have attempted to examine the social relationship between adults and children. Goode argues that most of the social scientific research that has been conducted during the course of the last several decades has examined the phenomena of adult/child interaction from the adult point of view. Goode posits that children think about and organize the events in their everyday world in a different way than adults do. He uses the term "Kids Culture" (p.166) to describe the way children see and act upon events in their everyday world. Goode notes that it is within this kid culture that children learn to experience their world in a

more autonomous way enabling them to develop separate self-identities without adult intervention. Goode further notes that access and participation in kid culture is not guaranteed to all children in our society. He argues that because children with severe disabilities have so much of their sense of self-identity given to them by the adults who care for them, they are often denied access to kid culture. Therefore, they never learn to experience and organize their everyday world in the same way normal children do.

In Chapter Seven Goode discusses the conclusions of his research and summarizes what has happened to the deaf/blind mentally retarded children and their families in the twenty year period since his study was completed. Goode argues that research on disability is still in its early stages of development. Researchers need to spend more time directly observing and talking with people with disabilities, in order for them to fully understand the realities of their everyday world. The author concludes that in the last two decades some improvements have been made in the quality of services offered to severely disabled children and their families. However, there is still much that needs to be done to assist individuals with severe disabilities to achieve full integration into the mainstream of society.

In the opinion of this reviewer, Goode's book represents a passionate appeal for human understanding. The author's treatment of a difficult human issue is caring and sensitive. The narrative descriptions in the book are presented to readers in a clear, concise, and informative way. The book would make an excellent text for social scientists developing university level courses on psychosocial aspects of disability. The book would also make an excellent resource for special education and human service professionals working in community-based agencies providing needed educational and social services to children with severe disabilities and their families.

Emotion in Organizations, by Stephen Fineman. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993. 230 pp. \$55.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper. ISBN 0-8039-8734-X.

Glenn E. Nilson

Eastern Connecticut State University

Willimantic, Connecticut

Emotion in Organizations offers an important contribution to the study of emergent changes in the sociology of organizations, especially organizational change. It challenges the reader to reconceptualize certain